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USEPA Awards NJMC for Strides in Environmental Policymaking; Eco-tourism Outreach

LYNDHURST, N.J. – The New Jersey Meadowlands Commission today celebrated earning an Environmental Quality Award from the United States Environmental Protection Agency.

“It is deeply rewarding to receive recognition for our accomplishments recovering and protecting these valuable urban wetlands of the Meadowlands District,” said NJMC Chairwoman Susan Bass Levin, also the Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs. “A recent history of environmental and science-supported policymaking has helped change the reputation of this region from an unsalvageable dumping ground to a noteworthy destination of wildlife habitats and parks.”

The award follows a decided policy shift in the NJMC’s new Master Plan to preserve 8,400 acres of open space and wetlands within the 32-square mile Meadowlands District while targeting redevelopment to upland, already built upon areas and brownfields. Since the plan’s adoption in 2004, the NJMC has acquired 987 acres of land for preservation, begun extensive habitat enhancement of 1,027 acres, and opened or planned five new waterside parks, including River Barge Park and Marina in Carlstadt. The 4-acre site, currently under construction, will include maritime artifacts, trails, educational signage, motorized boat slips, launches for canoes and kayaks, and picnic areas.

“Twenty years ago you probably would not have found government policy makers, environmental organizations and businesses sitting at the same table to talk about the future of the Meadowlands District. There really was no common ground; no incentive to cooperate,” said New Jersey Audubon Society President Tom Gilmore in a nomination letter to the USEPA. “With the adoption of a new Master Plan in 2004, the NJMC has made a commitment to the environment and a commitment to balanced development in the District.”

The agency was also commended for promoting eco-tourism and passive recreation through summer pontoon boat cruises and guided canoe tours, which provide an up-close look at salt marshes, terrapin turtles, fiddler crabs, and 260 avian species that visit the

Meadowlands as part of their migration along the Atlantic Flyway. Other achievements included eight miles of well-marked trails for exercise, year-round programs at the Meadowlands Environment Center and cooperative events and programs with conservation groups.

In August 2006, the NJMC announced the release of “Birding and Wildlife Trails,” a 72-page color guide to help visitors discover the recreational opportunities available in the Meadowlands and greater Hackensack River Watershed Area of Bergen and Hudson Counties. The guide, available in English and Spanish, also features catch-and-release fishing sites, driving directions, and an insert on local shops and restaurants. To date, more than 40,000 copies of the guide have been distributed to civic organizations, libraries, museums, area residents and prospective tourists from as far away as the Virgin Islands, Singapore, and Tel Aviv.

The USEPA annually honors individuals and organizations [which](#) have made significant contributions to environmental quality during the previous year. Criteria include creating unique or location-specific benefits, producing results that can be sustained or reproduced, and increasing public involvement in environmental action.

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